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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION
BUREAU OF ANIMAL INDUSTRY

RAISING RACCOONS 1/

SELECTING A RANCH SITE

A well-drained suburban or farm property with a generous supply of fresh drinking water offers a suitable site on which to raise raccoons. Plenty of shade and some sunlight are essential to the health of the animals. They are great climbers, and to furnish them a means of exercise trees are sometimes permitted to stand in their pens.

PENS AND DENS

Raccoons behave well in captivity and are more easily handled than most other fur animals. Pens 24 feet long, 12 feet wide, and 6 feet high, similar to those for foxes, are satisfactory for raccoons. If there are no trees in the pen, it is best that the sides and top be completely covered with woven-wire netting, 16 gage, 1-1/2-inch mesh. The wire may extend into the ground 6 inches, or an 18-inch wire carpet may be fastened to the side walls and ends to prevent the animals from digging out. Instead of completely covering the top of the pen, an overhang of galvanized iron 2 feet wide may be constructed around the top. Trees allowed to remain in the pens should be far enough away from the side walls to prevent the raccoons from climbing over and escaping.

Dens with removable nest-boxes, such as those recommended for foxes, are well adapted for raccoons. These should be placed outside the pen just as with foxes, for pens and dens are more easily cleaned and kept sanitary under this system than if the den is placed inside the pen. Various types of dens and pens have proved successful. Important points to keep in mind in constructing dens are the comfort of the animals and the ease with which the dens can be kept clean by the caretaker. Pens will remain clean much longer if constructed on ground that is covered with grass.

FEEDING

Raccoons relish and thrive on a variety of foods. They are fond of all kinds of dried bread mixed with milk, and will readily consume mushes made of cereals to which milk has been added. Cooked meats and meat scraps, in combination with cooked cereals, make a good feed, and sweet fruits are very tempting to the animals.

1/ Formerly Wildlife Leaflet 251 issued by the Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior.

Raccoons require more food than do foxes. They are heavy feeders and should be given liberal rations. Adults may be fed once daily, preferably late in the afternoon. Females with young and young raccoons should be fed twice daily, morning and evening. In the north, during November, before the coldest months of the year, the animals must be given more food than in any other month to prepare them for their hibernation. If they come out of the den during the hibernation period, food should be given to them. The same good judgment required in feeding other fur animals is necessary with raccoons. The only water necessary is that supplied for drinking and plenty should be provided for that purpose. Food and water vessels should be kept scrupulously clean at all times.

BREEDING

As a rule, only those raccoons having the darkest pelts should be selected for breeding stock. A strain of black raccoons has been developed by selective breeding, and breedings seem to be reasonably true to type. Raccoons have one heat period and one breeding season each year. They are polygamous, and one male can serve two or more females. When not kept in one pen, the male and the females should be put together about the middle of November. They sometimes breed late in January, but more frequently in February. The period of gestation is approximately 63 days, and litters of one to six young will arrive in March, April, or May. Litters of six are common, but four is about the average number. Raccoons will breed and produce young in their first year, but their litters are generally smaller than those produced by more mature animals.

MANAGEMENT

The methods of feeding and breeding raccoons are similar to those followed in fox raising. It is best to separate the males from the females about the first of March, for the female is capable of looking after her young without aid. She should be fed liberally a few days after the young are born. The young may be left with her until they are well grown and eating freely, at which time they may be placed in a separate pen.

Raccoons should never be given anything but clean, wholesome food. In the coldest weather it is not necessary to feed them, as they hibernate during a period of three weeks or a month. It is well to look into the nest box a few days after the young are born to see how they are getting along, and to remove any dead ones.

Raccoons can be moved from one place to another by means of a catching box or a cage constructed for that purpose.